



On Parenting

News and events for parents in the Washington area

Doctor's orders, get outside

By Janice D'Arcy

Forget Tylenol. Your pediatrician might prescribe a walk in the woods.

The National Park Service initiative called "prescribing parks" may soon arrive locally. "The idea is to involve the medical community in encouraging families to spend time outdoors," said Dr. Robert Zarr, president of the D.C. chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, which is in the early stages of developing the program here.

Zarr is working to create a database and rating system for local parks that doctors can use to match the right parks to the right families.

From a health perspective, Zarr said there are valid reasons for prescribing nature. His top three: To combat asthma, which is often exacerbated by indoor pollutants; to lessen some of the symptoms of Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, which has been shown to respond well to outdoor play and, of course, to combat the modern scourge I wrote about last week, childhood obesity.



(Melissa Cannarozzi - The Washington Post)

If you don't want to wait for a prescription, join Zarr and parks advocates this Saturday in one of their other joint projects: The First annual National Kids to Parks Day . It's a nationwide effort spearheaded by The National Park Trust to explore national, state or local parks.

The kickoff on the National Mall tomorrow might be soggy. The weather is expected to clear by Saturday, when families in the region are invited to Mason Neck State Park in Fairfax from 9 a.m. to noon for ranger walks, canoe demonstrations and other activities.

For those of us who can't make it to Mason Neck, Zarr and his colleagues want us to get our families outside, somewhere green as soon as possible. Doctor's orders.